United Nations E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.1

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 April 2018

Original: English

High-level political forum on sustainable development
Convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council
9–18 July 2018

Report of the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its second session

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the report of the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its second session, held in Geneva on 1 and 2 March 2018, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

18-06710 (E) 180518

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Report of the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its second session

I. Attendance

1. The second session of the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region was held at the International Conference Centre Geneva on 1 and 2 March 2018. The session was chaired by the Special Envoy for Global Sustainable Development of Switzerland, Michael Gerber.

2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 51 ECE member States: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

3. The following non-member State of ECE attended: Islamic Republic of Iran.

4. The European Union was represented by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the European Union SWITCH to Green Facility, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

5. Representatives of the following United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations, conventions and initiatives attended the meeting: Convention on Biological Diversity, Environment Management Group, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union, International Trade Centre, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN-Water, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Group, United Nations Development Programme, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Sustainable Development Goals Action Campaign, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, United Nations Volunteers, World Bank Group, World Health Organization and World Meteorological Organization.

6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations also took part in the session: Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Eurasian Economic Commission, International Energy Agency Clean Coal Centre, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, Nordic Council of Ministers, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Organization of Islamic

Cooperation, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus, Union for the Mediterranean, and United Cities and Local Governments.

7. Representatives of 110 non-governmental organizations and representatives of other organizations and independent experts also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the regional forum (https://www.unece.org/rfsd2018.html).

II. Opening and adoption of the agenda

8. The regional forum adopted the provisional agenda for the session, contained in document ECE/RFSD/2018/1.

9. In his opening remarks, the Chair of the regional forum emphasized that the forum served as a regional space to share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Interaction among the participants was essential in order to achieve practical value added and peer learning. Some of the challenges faced by the countries of the ECE region were different, but many were also similar. The regional forum therefore presented an opportunity to find common ground for ways to move forward.

10. The President of the Economic and Social Council pointed to new economic and technological opportunities, as well as to rising inequalities in many countries, which were undermining social cohesion and participation. Crucial international frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda, directly addressed those pressing global challenges. There was a need to work together multilaterally to achieve the goals set in the frameworks. The Economic and Social Council and its system, including the high-level political forum on sustainable development, had a key role to play in that regard.

11. Addressing participants through a video message, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations welcomed the engagement of the middle-income and advanced countries of the ECE region in the regional forum, which reflected the universal character of the 2030 Agenda. The regional forum provided an opportunity for an exchange of views on different approaches and for addressing transboundary matters among a variety of partners. The close collaboration among ECE and the other regional United Nations entities in organizing the regional forum was carried out in the spirit of current efforts to reposition the United Nations development system.

12. The ECE Executive Secretary expressed her satisfaction with the increased interest in the regional forum. She underscored that the topics of the round tables represented the core areas of the expertise of ECE, areas that were insufficiently covered by the United Nations development system. ECE was ready to contribute its expertise and convening power to help fill those gaps. ECE was very pleased with the cooperation with the other members of the United Nations family in the region. Working as the United Nations system towards an even greater impact and fully utilizing the potential for collaboration among member States, civil society, international organizations, the private sector and academia were essential for progress to be made.

13. The Chair of the Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia pointed out that progress on the Sustainable Development Goals in the region had been accelerated through participation, streamlined policy planning, innovation, alternative financing for the Goals and a more defined role for the private sector. In addition, much-needed reviews of statistical capacities and systems had

taken place. Nevertheless, many countries in the region were facing complex challenges. The joint work and coordination undertaken regionally within the United Nations system in Europe and Central Asia was recognized as a model of cooperation. Inter-agency mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support strategy missions were an example of partnership-based approaches that directly addressed the needs of the host country.

III. High-level policy segment: transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies in the Economic Commission for Europe region

14. The Chair of the regional forum moderated the high-level policy segment. The following high-level and other representatives made interventions during the segment: Gramoz Ruçi, Speaker of the Parliament, Albania; Tudor Ulianovschi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Republic of Moldova; Marianna Shchetkina, Deputy Chair of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly, National Coordinator on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, Belarus; Ashot Hovakimian, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Armenia; Aidin Sharipbekov, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Economy, Kyrgyzstan; Franc Matjaž Zupančič, State Secretary, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Slovenia; Andrius Krivas, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations in Geneva; Zbigniew Czech, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations in Geneva; Didier Chambovey, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the World Trade Organization and the European Free Trade Association; Ivan Ivanisevic, Director General for Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Montenegro; Galit Cohen, Senior Deputy Director General, Planning, Policy and Strategy, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Israel; Huseyn Huseynov, Head of Department for Sustainable Development, Ministry of the Economy, Secretary of the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development, Azerbaijan; Annika Lindblom, Counsellor, Ministry of the Environment, Secretary-General of the National Commission on Sustainable Development, Finland; and Anne-Mareike Vanselow, Desk Officer, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany.

15. The following high-level representatives from intergovernmental organizations made interventions: Dragana Filipovic, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the Council of Europe to the United Nations Office at Geneva; and Nedret Emiroglu, Deputy Regional Director, World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe.

16. Civil society organizations conveyed to the regional forum the outcome of a preparatory civil society consultation that took place on 28 February 2018. The civil society positions were presented by Anja Andrea Frydensberg Pedersen, YouAct — European Youth Network on Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

17. A keynote address on evidence-based policymaking for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was delivered by Peter Messerli, Professor of Sustainable Development, University of Bern, and Co-Chair of the group of independent scientists appointed to draft the Global Sustainable Development Report.

18. The Chair's summary, contained in the annex to the present report, outlines the main issues raised at the regional forum. Written statements are available on the website of the forum.

IV. Peer learning segment

19. The Secretary of the regional forum provided an overview of the round tables, which constituted the peer learning segment of the forum. The forum had before it a compilation of case studies (ECE/RFSD/2018/INF1).

20. To facilitate practical and targeted peer learning, the segment was structured into two sets of five parallel round tables, covering Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15, which will be the subject of in-depth reviews at the high-level political forum in 2018. Peer learning and interactive discussions were facilitated by the presentation of case studies with practical solutions and specific approaches to achieve progress in a certain area of the Goals. Informal concept notes for all the round tables and summaries of the case studies are available on the website of the regional forum. The Chair's summary, contained in the annex to the present report, sets out the main challenges, policy responses and measures discussed at each round table.

A. First set of round tables

1. Sustainable water: making universal access to water and sanitation a reality in the Economic Commission for Europe region

21. The round table was moderated by Oliver Schmoll, Programme Manager, Water and Climate, European Centre for Environment and Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe. The rapporteur was Peter Kovacs, Head of the River Basin Management and Water Protection Department, Ministry of the Interior, Hungary, and Chair of the Bureau of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). Case studies were presented or submitted by France, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition.

2. Sustainable energy: improving the efficiency of the energy system

22. The round table was moderated by Scott Foster, Director, Sustainable Energy Division, ECE. The rapporteur was Antonela Solujic, Head of the Department for Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Mining and Energy, Serbia, and Vice-Chair of the ECE Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency. Case studies were presented or submitted by Germany, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine.

3. Sustainable cities and communities: financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities — challenges and opportunities

23. The round table was moderated by Marco Kamiya, Coordinator, a.i., Urban Economy and Finance Branch, UN-Habitat, and Krista Kampus, Senior Adviser and Head of the Sustainable Development Unit — Baltic 2030, Council of the Baltic Sea States. The rapporteur was Damegul Kabiyeva, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the United Nations in Geneva. Case studies were presented or submitted by the Council of Europe Development Bank, Belgium (region of Flanders), Czechia, Glasgow City Council and Italy.

4. Sustainable consumption and production: successful approaches to delivering on sustainable consumption and production by 2030

24. The round table was moderated by Marco Keiner, Director, Environment Division, ECE, and Charles Arden-Clarke, head of the secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns,

Economy Division, UNEP. The rapporteur was Andrea Innamorati, Senior Policy Adviser, Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy. Case studies were presented or submitted by Kazakhstan, Latvia, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland.

5. Sustainable forests and ecosystems: sustainable forest management and the Sustainable Development Goals

25. The round table was moderated by Thomas Haussmann, Senior Officer, Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Germany. The rapporteur was Christoph Dürr, International Forest Policy Adviser, Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland. Case studies were presented or submitted by Austria, the European network INTEGRATE, Finland, IKEA, Kazakhstan and Poland.

B. Second set of round tables

1. Sustainable water: sharing water — balancing competing needs in a context of declining resources

26. The round table was moderated by Stefan Uhlenbrook, Coordinator, World Water Assessment Programme, UNESCO. The rapporteur was Peter Kovacs, Head of the River Basin Management and Water Protection Department, Ministry of the Interior, Hungary, and Chair of the Bureau of the Water Convention. Case studies were presented or submitted by Germany, Finland, Hungary, Serbia, Switzerland and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

2. Sustainable energy: transforming energy in support of the 2030 Agenda

27. The round table was moderated by Ulrich Benterbusch, Deputy Director, Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany, and Aleksandar Dukovski, Senior Energy Expert and Chair, ECE Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency. The rapporteur was Iva Brkic, Energy Expert, Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations in Geneva. Case studies were presented or submitted by the Centre for Promotion of Sustainable Development (Serbia), Czechia, Kazakhstan and Spain.

3. Sustainable cities and communities: promoting resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements

28. The round table was moderated by Adam Banaszak, Committee of the Regions, European Union. The rapporteur was Franc Matjaž Zupančič, State Secretary, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Slovenia. Case studies were presented or submitted by Kyrgyzstan, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Province of Potenza (Italy), the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus, the Russian Federation and Serbia.

4. Sustainable consumption and production: towards a circular economy — innovation for sustainable value chains

29. The round table was moderated by Charles Arden-Clarke, head of the secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, Economy Division, UNEP, and Geoffrey Hamilton, Acting Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, ECE. The rapporteur was Andrea Innamorati, Senior Policy Adviser, Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy. Case studies were presented or submitted by Czechia, Italy, Montenegro, the Netherlands, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Republic of Moldova and Slovenia.

5. Sustainable forests and ecosystems: biodiversity at the heart of sustainable development — towards transformation and resilience

30. The round table was moderated by Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity. The rapporteur was Christoph Dürr, International Forest Policy Adviser, Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland. Case studies were presented or submitted by Georgia, Poland and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

V. Connecting the dots: sustainable resource management and lifestyles in the region

31. The segment on "connecting the dots: sustainable resource management and lifestyles in the region", featured the presentation of reports from the round tables by the seven rapporteurs. The reporting was followed by an interactive discussion on the linkages between the various Sustainable Development Goals and their operationalization for more integrated policymaking. The annex to the present report contains a summary of the discussion and its main conclusions by the Chair of the forum.

VI. Closing

32. In her closing remarks, the ECE Executive Secretary expressed her hope that the ideas and suggestions exchanged at the regional forum would spur action and accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the countries and the region. She underscored the importance of different actors and partners engaging in meaningful discussions at the regional forum.

33. Taking stock of progress so far, the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva saw a mixed picture of implementation of the Goals. The magnitude of the challenges had yet to be met by the pace of actions. The regional forum demonstrated the vital role that regional actors played in the necessary transformation. It was also a laboratory of ideas, strategies and best practices with applicability for the region and for the world beyond. For the outcomes of the regional forum to take root, the Director-General invited participants to look at Geneva as the operational heart of the international system. A key convener to leverage and amplify Geneva's collective expertise was the Office's sustainable development goals laboratory.

34. Delivering closing remarks on behalf of civil society, the Vice-President of the European Disability Forum stressed a number of key messages referring to the topics of the peer learning round tables. He reaffirmed that civil society organizations stood ready to support member States and ECE in building an inclusive, sustainable and prosperous world, with the ultimate goal of ending poverty, protecting the planet, including persons with disabilities and leaving no one behind.

35. Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed participants that the draft report of the regional forum, including the Chair's summary of the discussions, would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the ECE region to the high-level political forum to be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018.

Annex

Chair's summary of the discussions

High-level policy segment: transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies in the Economic Commission for Europe region

1. The high-level policy segment provided an opportunity to take stock of progress and challenges and exchange views on major factors influencing implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region. In addition, participants considered the impact of voluntary national reviews on implementation of the Goals. The discussions also touched upon the critical role of science in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

How to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: coordination, coherence and partnerships

2. Sustainable development requires addressing significant challenges through integrated solutions based on new models of production and consumption. There is no single recipe for this, and different alternatives are possible. The interconnected character of the 2030 Agenda provides new policy spaces and potential pathways for implementation.

3. The universality of the Sustainable Development Goals means that they are relevant for all countries. Given the linkages between the different challenges and the external spillovers of domestic actions, the initiatives of a few sustainability champions are not sufficient for success. In this context, where the domestic and foreign impacts of policies are difficult to separate, international cooperation acquires an increased importance.

4. Governments at all levels have the ultimate responsibility to lead the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but all stakeholders have to contribute so as to ensure rapid and effective progress. The important role of international organizations in providing various types of expertise was also acknowledged.

5. The involvement of civil society is essential for engaging in partnerships, giving visibility to issues that might receive insufficient attention and exploring a range of alternative policy options. Civil society organizations argued that a rights perspective was necessary in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, so that all groups, including women, persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, migrants and others, had their rights upheld.

6. The 2030 Agenda provides a global and universal road map, which serves not only as a signpost for changes at the national level but also as a vehicle for effective cooperation on sustainable development with other countries. Some countries, like Lithuania, have reformed their development cooperation policies to better support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Building coherence between national and global policies and, more specifically, identifying the global impact of national actions, are critical challenges for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region. Despite the progress observed so far, it was acknowledged that this was an ongoing process. The importance of regional cooperation for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was stressed, in particular because many Goals and targets had a transboundary dimension.

8. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals has been linked to national development strategies and, in some countries, is closely related to the

European Union integration agenda, such as in Montenegro. Middle-income countries share common problems and challenges, as reflected in the conclusions of the recent regional Sustainable Development Goals coordination leaders forum (Minsk, 21–23 February 2018). This group of countries has particular needs, which should be acknowledged, and requires the support of United Nations organizations and international financial institutions. Mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support strategy missions were mentioned as useful tools.

9. In many countries, interministerial coordination mechanisms have proven to promote policy coherence, solve possible policy conflicts, increase awareness among ministries about the 2030 Agenda, ensure equal responsibility of all departments for its implementation and promote a long-term partnership with all stakeholders.

10. Some participants also stressed the need to involve different levels of government. In some countries, such as in Belarus, subnational groups on the Sustainable Development Goals have been created. Local authorities are key players in achieving many of the Goals. However, they need to be empowered through decentralization policies and enabled through capacity-building tools. The diversity observed in the experiences related to cities is a source of comparative knowledge that can help shape policies at other levels of governance.

11. The role of parliaments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was strongly emphasized. Parliaments approve new legislation and exert control over governments, including on budgetary matters. They can guide government's work on the basis of annual implementation reports. The involvement of parliaments has led in some countries, like Albania, to the creation of specific structures, such as the designation of focal points for the Sustainable Development Goals in each parliamentary committee in order to provide an effective oversight of activities related to the Goals or the creation of subcommittees focused on specific Goals. Interparliamentary cooperation could contribute effectively to the exchange of experiences.

12. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will not be possible without strengthening the effectiveness of the State. Improving the quality of laws and their application and increasing the efficiency of public institutions, including by breaking down silos, would increase the ability of governments at all levels to ensure coherent and effective implementation. This would also have positive effects on social acceptance and trust by citizens.

13. It should be acknowledged that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is a process that will take many years. This time dimension calls for strategic considerations, including the identification of priorities and the sequencing of actions. The urgency of the challenges ahead creates a limited window of opportunity to intervene, so action needs to start immediately.

14. Interventions in some particular areas may accelerate implementation of the Goals. Advancing gender equality would have a broad and positive impact on the 2030 Agenda. Digitalization and innovation, including new institutional arrangements, can be important factors facilitating progress, as emphasized by Armenia, Israel and Kyrgyzstan.

15. In addition, trade, which has been identified as a means of implementation in the 2030 Agenda, has acquired an increased policy relevance. The challenge is how best to use trade to support economy-wide development and structural transformation towards products with high added value. To exploit the potential of trade for positive change, it is important to ensure coherence between trade and policies in other areas, so that they are mutually supportive. This whole-of-government approach should cut across policy domains and institutional divisions, as is being done in the Republic of Moldova.

16. The importance of data for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals was stressed by many participants. Data should be disaggregated, including by gender, age, geographic area, disability, income level and others factors, to track the situation of particular groups, including migrants, persons with disabilities and others. Participants presented experiences on how online follow-up mechanisms can enable a multi-stakeholder discussion on the progress made, on gaps and on prospects for future development, as is being done, for example, in Finland.

17. Appropriate financing embedded in budgetary processes and long-term financial planning is necessary for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The inclusion of sustainable development considerations in the State budget at all levels is a key step in mainstreaming the Goals into all sectoral policies and the allocation of financial resources. In some countries, ministries have to consider their policies, initiatives and resource demands from a perspective that takes into account the Goals. Besides domestic public resources, other sources of financing need to be mobilized, including private sector and external financing.

Contribution of voluntary national reviews to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

18. Robust and efficient monitoring and review mechanisms are key for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There is a need to keep track of what has been achieved and identify areas where more and faster progress is required. Voluntary national reviews were assessed as effective instruments by countries that have already made presentations at the high-level political forum.

19. Voluntary national reviews are useful in different ways, including raising awareness among stakeholders, promoting ownership among different ministries, understanding the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda and fostering coordination and cooperation to monitor progress.

20. Carrying out voluntary national reviews has been closely connected with the preparation and implementation of development strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as was the case in Slovenia. These reviews can function as a trigger for establishing the overall mechanisms and policies for implementation while keeping up the momentum for action. Moreover, the reviews serve to identify priorities and to focus on the adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals to local, subnational and national contexts.

21. One of the key lessons of the voluntary national reviews shared by participants is the importance of the way in which the reviews are prepared. The preparation of these reviews has often triggered extensive consultations, as was the case in Switzerland, involving representatives of ministries and other state institutions, as well as representatives of local and subnational governments, non-governmental organizations, local communities, the private sector, professional organizations and academia. The reviews can also contribute to increasing awareness and ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals, supported by communication campaigns and the organization of thematic events, as in France. This is critical, since the Goals, and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, rely on the mobilization of all actors.

22. Participatory models in the preparation of the voluntary national reviews are sometimes supported by the creation of task forces and the appointment of thematic coordinators for each Sustainable Development Goal, as in Poland. In some cases, a wide range of stakeholders has been included, together with the Government, in advisory bodies. Some countries, like Germany, have offered part of the presentation slot for their review at the high-level political forum to non-State actors. A whole-of-government approach should be combined with a whole-of-society one.

Importance of scientific evidence

23. Reaching a broad consensus on what needs to be done is facilitated when proposed actions are backed up by scientific evidence. Science of all disciplines can provide a better understanding of the linkages, synergies and trade-offs between different Goals and targets, and clear, evidence-informed recommendations for effective implementation. It can offer solutions and innovations to respond to global challenges. It also facilitates the identification of factors that are driving major trends and their impact.

24. The ability to advance in particular areas or launch specific initiatives depends on two factors. The first factor is the existence of uncontested evidence supporting action. This factual certainty contributes to generating consensus, but it is not sufficient. The second factor is a high degree of societal agreement. Interventions are harder in areas where there is a lack of both sufficient knowledge and social support. There is therefore a need to increase the knowledge base all over the world, including through the creation of experimental spaces for learning and sufficient funding for basic and applied research. Strong multi-stakeholder partnerships are critical to both develop these spaces and widen the social acceptance for implementation.

Peer learning segment

First round table on sustainable water (Goal 6): making universal access to water and sanitation a reality in the Economic Commission for Europe region

25. The 2030 Agenda reaffirms the commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Sustainable Development Goal 6 stipulates an integrated approach to water resources management and the provision of water and sanitation services. The ECE region is still far from reaching universal and equitable access to safe water and sanitation for all. Despite progress made in the past decades, inequities in access persist. Aggregated data frequently masks inequalities. There remain large urban/rural disparities, unaddressed affordability issues and problems of access in specific settings such as schools, hospitals and prisons. In addition, marginalized population groups such as minorities, rural women, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees require increased attention.

26. Problems are particularly acute in rural areas, where about three quarters of the people without basic access to water live. The situation for sanitation is even worse. In schools, toilets often do not meet the needs of pupils and in particular adolescent girls, affecting their learning, dignity and well-being. Inadequate water and sanitation services or poor hygiene increase the risk of infections and negatively affect school attendance. In addition to access, the quality and safety of water and sanitation services requires serious policy attention. Challenges related to affordability of services are also of growing concern. In some countries of the ECE region, poor households are likely to spend over 3 per cent of total expenditures on water and sanitation.

27. Policy solutions to address affordability may include both tariff-related and non-tariff-related instruments. Social tariffs can be a good instrument to overcome affordability issues for lower-income households. However, choosing the best method for funding social tariffs and identifying beneficiaries are challenging tasks. In most low-income households, the affordability issue is not limited to water and sanitation services and therefore mechanisms that tackle poverty in an integrated manner are necessary.

28. Water and sanitation infrastructures are lacking or deteriorating in parts of the region and are in need of repair and maintenance; capital investment needs are

therefore high. Water tariffs are often not adequate to cover maintenance costs. Tariff collection rates are often negatively affected by poor services resulting from deteriorating infrastructure, which may cause financial problems. Overall, financing and investment remain largely below the level needed to address water and sanitation challenges in the region.

29. Effective action requires bringing together different sectors and working across various policy areas (environment, health, education and others). Better governance processes and the involvement of stakeholders at various levels result in improved access to safe and equitable services.

30. Water and sanitation services are frequently provided at the local level and therefore local stakeholders, including civil society organizations, need to be fully involved. Local governments should be empowered to implement nationally defined policies on affordability. Civil society organizations drew attention to the limitations of privatization of water provision and called for strengthening of public ownership and regulation.

31. Public participation and access to information are essential elements of decision-making. All concerned groups need to be included when developing plans and policies for improving infrastructure and achieving universal and equitable access.

32. A unique feature of the pan-European region is the existence of legally binding instruments (the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and its Protocol on Water and Health) to support the implementation of Goals 6 and 3 and other water-related Goals and targets. These regional instruments lead to the establishment of national targets and action plans and provide platforms for sharing experiences. The Protocol explicitly calls for ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation to promote health and well-being for all. It promotes self-assessment of the situation of access to water and sanitation through an equity lens. Outcomes of such assessments have proven to put the issue higher on the political agenda and foster policy development.

33. The European Union Water Initiative supports countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in setting and implementing national targets and ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation. This support is coordinated through intersectoral and inter-agency platforms.

Second round table on sustainable water (Goal 6): sharing water — balancing competing needs in a context of declining resources

34. Water scarcity is becoming more acute, even in previously water-rich countries, owing to climate change and growing water use, including increasing water demand for irrigation in agriculture. This causes heavy economic impacts on all sectors, strong water competition and environmental challenges.

35. Reduced flows can also imply degrading water quality, notably through concentration of pollutants such as nutrients. Quality is also threatened by the complex chemical environment, including from modern lifestyles and the use of cosmetics, drugs and cleaning and plastic products. Countries are adjusting and updating the legal and regulatory requirements to address these emerging challenges and facilitate a more efficient use of water (e.g. regarding micropollutants or water reuse).

36. The fact that most water resources in the ECE region are shared across borders brings additional challenges in balancing water uses, allocating water and addressing water scarcity at a transboundary level. In this context, the lack of common data for a shared understanding and of jointly agreed assessment methodologies to form the

basis for water sharing, as well as legal and information gaps, create additional difficulties.

37. For more than 20 years the Water Convention has supported integrated water resources management and the peaceful and sustainable use of shared resources. Specific regulations in line with the Convention can be adopted to address challenges such as water allocation and scarcity at the transboundary level.

38. Cost recovery and appropriate technologies for saving water are very important in reducing water use, especially in agriculture, in the most water-scarce parts of the region. Water recycling and reuse, as well as nature-based solutions such as natural water retention, are also crucial in dealing with water scarcity. The repair and upgrading of ageing water infrastructure provide an opportunity to introduce changes, such as multi-purpose use of hydropower reservoirs and improving efficiency and safety of water distribution. New technological solutions are needed to increase water efficiency and improve water quality, and available technologies should be employed more widely.

39. Solutions to water problems often go beyond the realm of the water sector. It is therefore vital to find synergies with other sectors and to adopt an integrated/nexus perspective when evaluating actions by considering the impacts of measures in various sectors and their interaction. There are numerous common benefits from such an integrated approach, for example increasing energy efficiency can also raise water use efficiency, and vice versa.

40. At the same time, when such interlinkages are not properly assessed there are risks for sustainability as, for example, concerning the impacts for water use, water quality and hydromorphology if effects from energy production, including of biofuels, are not taken into account. Renewable energy development is becoming more sustainable, including through international guidance and intersectoral dialogues. Regarding water quality, preventing pollution (which requires cooperation with other sectors such as agriculture and industry) is more effective than treatment. What constitutes wastewater for one particular user can be a resource for another user, thus contributing to dealing with water scarcity.

41. The private sector is not only a partner in financing, but it can also play a key role in implementation. Companies are progressively adopting more sustainable approaches, as they are becoming increasingly aware of the business risks associated with water scarcity. However, the action of regulators continues to be necessary.

First round table on sustainable energy (Goal 7): improving the efficiency of the energy system

42. Improvements in energy efficiency can play a role in meeting climate objectives, ensuring energy security, enhancing quality of life and improving economic performance. Although the benefits of energy efficiency initiatives are evident, there is a low level of awareness of their positive impact across a range of indicators. This demands additional efforts by policymakers, businesses and other stakeholders to implement energy efficiency projects.

43. Provision of energy services in buildings must ensure the welfare of their occupants, including health and comfort aspects, while being attentive to energy poverty and gender dimensions. Improving energy efficiency can play an important role in addressing these concerns.

44. Participants proposed a number of options to raise energy efficiency. For large-scale energy efficiency projects, cooperation between authorities at the national and local levels, industry and local communities is indispensable in making them economically viable. Multiple benefits need to be taken into account, for example the

positive impacts on pollution and health, so that social returns on public interventions are properly assessed.

45. A well-developed programme of financial incentives for households could increase implementation of energy efficiency measures in the residential sector. A public fund for energy efficiency can provide funding for pilot projects that have the potential to be scaled up and can be used to leverage significant financial flows. Information and awareness campaigns for the general public may be one of the most cost-effective ways to improve energy efficiency in the residential sector. Education programmes would improve the understanding of energy efficiency benefits.

46. Significant improvements in industrial energy efficiency are possible with the introduction of sound business models. There is a need to develop proper instruments to incentivize retrofitting and renovation of outdated and inefficient infrastructure in accordance with modern standards.

47. Initiatives such as reducing market barriers to sustainable energy technology and deployment of standards such as the Framework Guidelines for Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings can bring real benefits. Normative instruments, as well as audits, energy management systems, proper measurement and verification, incentives and, as needed, fines, are practical measures to promote energy efficiency.

48. The energy system remains dominated by fossil fuels and stronger efforts are needed to decarbonize the economy. Energy prices should reflect the full costs of energy production and use, including externalities such as greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. This could be done, for example, through carbon markets or carbon taxes. These prices would promote sustainable management of energy resources and accelerate the uptake of energy efficiency and clean energy technologies.

49. The use of energy subsidies should be rationalized while exploring alternative ways to protect vulnerable groups. Subsidies that stimulate energy production and consumption should be replaced by instruments that encourage investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy. Monitoring and reporting on progress in achieving the targets of Goal 7 is critical for the necessary mid-course adjustments.

50. Information and communications technology opens new perspectives for energy system integration and resilience (including notably the introduction of intermittent renewables), urban management and empowerment of consumers, with positive implications for energy efficiency. However, cybersecurity issues also raise some concerns.

51. International cooperation and exchange of experiences among countries is crucial to accelerate improvements in energy efficiency. The Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction is an example of such cooperation to improve building energy performance. Participants also emphasized the important role ECE plays as a platform for identification and exchange of best practices.

Second round table on sustainable energy (Goal 7): transforming energy in support of the 2030 Agenda

52. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda poses a number of transformational challenges for the energy sector. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is also required to honour the commitments in the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Currently, the energy sector is a major polluter. However, in the short term the continued reliance on fossil fuels in the total primary energy supply of all ECE member States is a reality. Policymakers and the industry should cooperate to look for alternatives and take immediate steps to deploy transformative technologies that will reduce the carbon footprint of the energy sector and increase systemic and resource efficiencies.

53. Changing the energy mix towards cleaner sources of energy can play a role in the decarbonization of the energy system. Natural gas is less harmful to the environment compared with other fuels. Liquefied natural gas plays an important role in ensuring security and diversification of supplies. Participants discussed how trucks could be used to ship liquefied natural gas to remote or isolated communities, thus improving access to affordable and modern energy services. Transporting liquefied natural gas by truck could set the stage for the development of a future zero-carbon hydrogen infrastructure. In the Eurasian Economic Union, there are plans to create a common gas market by 2025, which would greatly contribute to better access to cleaner energy.

54. The change in the energy mix to reduce carbon emissions may take other forms. A case study was presented where the decline of coal-fired power generation may be accompanied by the construction of new nuclear units with zero carbon dioxide emissions. In addition, high-efficiency, low emission technologies would be introduced to improve the stability and reliability of the electricity system and facilitate deployment of renewable energy technologies. However, a shift towards increased reliance on nuclear energy remains highly controversial. Civil society organizations drew attention to the associated risks, including those from nuclear waste.

55. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and therefore reducing methane leakage would contribute to climate mitigation efforts. Appropriately managed coal mine methane can enhance mine safety and reduce the carbon footprint of primary energy production. Coal mine methane that would otherwise be vented into the atmosphere and contribute to global warming can be used as a clean fuel for power, heating or domestic uses. The problem of methane leakage can also be present in abandoned coal mines and non-producing coal fields. This infrastructure could therefore also be used in countries moving away from the use of coal and could be combined with advanced coal gasification technologies.

56. Decarbonization can be supported by an enabling policy and regulatory environment fostering the emergence of innovative business models and technological solutions. Policies can provide financial incentives and promote technology transfer in support of a more rapid shift towards a low-carbon energy system, including by contributing to scaling up cleaner low-carbon technologies and, in particular, renewable sources of energy.

57. Productive, equitable and meaningful participation of women at all levels in the development of the future sustainable energy system is necessary. Professional women need networks that facilitate their engagement in energy policy decision-making, so that women can contribute more actively to the structural transformation of the energy industry.

58. Effective communication with all relevant stakeholders is important in managing this transition and facilitating the emergence of cleaner technologies. There is a strong need to base policy decisions on available scientific evidence, which should provide a critical input when assessing different options.

First round table on sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11): financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities — challenges and opportunities

59. Governments design and implement a variety of programmes to support vulnerable population groups that cannot compete in housing markets with more well-off groups. International financial institutions provide resources to the Governments of countries with economies in transition to complement their efforts in the provision of affordable housing. These resources can be used to subsidize mortgages, provide grants or finance large-scale investment projects for urban renewal.

60. Regional and local authorities play an important role in financing urban renewal and adequate housing. In particular, they provide the necessary strategic visions, promote intersectoral cooperation and establish multi-stakeholder platforms. The promotion of smart and sustainable cities would benefit from stronger municipal budgets and an expansion of local revenue.

61. Public funding is very limited and therefore should be used for programmes reflecting the needs of the population, including various groups (youth, older persons, families, persons with disabilities). The active involvement of urban residents from all stakeholder groups is necessary, so that public authorities and developers promote local public interests.

62. The private sector is a major source of housing and urban development financing. Competition between private sector organizations would lower housing and infrastructure costs, while keeping habitability standards, thus increasing affordability. Public policies should therefore ensure a competitive environment. Effective public-private partnerships means reconciling the need to attract private financing with a continued focus on inclusiveness and peoples' needs.

63. Bridging the financial gap between insufficient public funds and large-scale needs in building and renewing urban infrastructure requires innovative solutions that are developed with the involvement of all key stakeholders. Some of the initiatives discussed included: a grant competition for cities to develop sustainable urban renewal projects that pay specific attention to climate neutrality, mobility and the quality of shared space; affordable housing programmes using subsidies and mortgage programmes with subsidized rates; strategic plans for urban renewal and development; and the establishment of a government-funded investment fund to support renovation of social infrastructure.

64. Strategic planning frameworks (long-term national, regional and city action plans) are critical for the successful implementation of urban projects, since they ensure the required long-term financial and institutional resources. An important factor contributing to this success is the institutional design of financing programmes. Strong vertical and horizontal coordination and stakeholder involvement promote greater efficiency.

65. Managing expectations and planning realistically is a common challenge faced by public authorities. Appropriate governance arrangements are essential, as the lack of capacity of implementing agencies and insufficient coordination between authorities may lead to delays in the implementation of projects. Coordination should therefore be strengthened. Plans should have an appropriate long-term horizon and should be formulated taking into account expert knowledge in both the planning and implementation stages.

Second round table on sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11): promoting resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements

66. There are different approaches to promoting sustainable urban development and resilience at the national, regional and local levels. However, overcoming the gaps in the availability of reliable data for urban planning and disaster risk management and reduction is a common challenge for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

67. The application of standards for disaggregated data collection and the use of comprehensive indexes that capture vulnerabilities to natural and man-made disasters can be effective tools to gather this critical information. There is a need to build capacities for data collection and analysis in local and national planning documents.

Inter-agency initiatives and collaboration with academic institutions can support these efforts.

68. There are multiple challenges in developing intersectoral cooperation between different authorities while also involving all stakeholders. It is therefore crucial to coordinate and synchronize the planning and implementation of activities at the national and local levels, as well as to ensure the necessary political will.

69. Critical tasks include mapping potential urban development and resilience challenges, developing risk-sensitive urban plans, implementing sustainable urban development measures and developing scenarios for long-term resilient, healthy and sustainable urban development. Progress in all these areas demands strong cooperation, capacity development and broad partnerships.

70. Inclusiveness and access for all should be important concerns when developing relevant initiatives. Bottom-up participation, transparency and accountability should be guiding principles in urban planning. The needs of vulnerable and marginalized people should be taken into account and supported by disaggregated data collection. Gender inclusive planning and budgeting are key to ensuring that cities provide safe public spaces that are free of gender-based violence, as stressed by civil society organizations.

71. The adoption of comprehensive legal frameworks supporting reconstruction of buildings can be effective measures to address hazard-risk vulnerabilities. However, lack of coordination between different authorities and legal inconsistencies create difficulties for implementation and weaken the role of the responsible authorities.

72. Appropriate financing for urban development and resilience, including for natural and man-made disaster management is essential. Promoting cost-sharing between different authorities and stakeholders, including the active involvement of private sector actors such as infrastructure and insurance companies, is important. This can reduce the financial burden of initiatives to alleviate the consequences of natural disasters and disaster prevention measures. Strengthening microfinance institutions and home-owners associations also contributes to scaling up financing for urban renewal and development.

73. Private-public partnerships play a role in creating smart, sustainable and resilient cities and addressing financing constraints. However, it is important that these partnerships are designed in such a way that they do not create a source of risk to public finances and that affordability and inclusiveness considerations are duly taken into account.

First round table on sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12): successful approaches to delivering on sustainable consumption and production by 2030

74. Sustainable consumption and production is an objective with links to most of the Sustainable Development Goals, although these relationships are not yet fully understood. Policies and actions to integrate Goal 12 across sectors and at all levels remain a challenge in many countries. There is also a need to ensure that large initiatives with the potential for significant investment and with a possible impact on the environment are green from the early stages of their development and in their implementation.

75. Goal 12 cannot be achieved without consumers changing their behaviour and making more educated choices, seeking sustainable products and choosing to repair rather than replace. Information on products and their environmental and social impacts is often lacking or even misleading.

76. Poor information also prevents a better understanding by the private sector of the longer-term benefits of sustainable consumption and production for business. Governments can send investment signals through incentives and regulations, while society can affect production through choices by consumers.

77. There are technologies that can contribute to sustainable consumption and production, but gaps remain between research and development on the one hand, and commercialization and implementation on the other. However, civil society organizations stressed that there is a need to go beyond innovation and increased consumer awareness: a systemic change is required to move to a new growth paradigm that reduces the use of resources in terms of absolute amounts.

78. There are multiple initiatives by governments and other stakeholders to tackle these challenges. Policy frameworks and action plans that enable the transition to more sustainable consumption and production patterns are being put in place. Regulation on issues such as planned obsolescence or the recovery and reuse of limited natural resources have been adopted in some countries. Innovation is being encouraged through financial assistance for start-up businesses and supportive regulatory frameworks. Companies are also given support to introduce technological solutions and best practices.

79. Sustainable public procurement is a particularly powerful instrument for all levels of government because of its weight in national economies and its effect on markets, but it is often misunderstood as expensive, complicated and time-consuming. Countries have established help desks, platforms and training centres, but regulations also have a key role to play. Other tools include eco-labelling, certification schemes and life-cycle cost calculators, which provide a basis for more informed decisions.

80. International cooperation can support technology transfer, help to attract investment and promote sharing of good practices. This includes the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. This Framework has generated the main platform that supports the shift to sustainable consumption and production globally, through action on the ground, networks and capacity-building. Several European countries have taken a leading role within this Framework. Several international organizations work on sustainable procurement in the health sector while others have launched a global dialogue on healthier environments through trade.

81. Starting small and scaling up initial efforts facilitate policy experimentation and successful outcomes. This strategy can also be followed when replicating or adapting existing initiatives to other national contexts, including by drawing on experiences presented in the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy and shared on the Green Growth Knowledge Platform.

82. A successful delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals requires investment in and improvement of infrastructure. Infrastructure projects present an important opportunity to accelerate the transition to a more resource-efficient economy if investment decisions are fully aligned with the Goals and if big infrastructure developments, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, do not put undue additional pressure on the environment. In this context, a particular concern is the increasing extraction of raw materials, especially in the pan-European region. The development and implementation of global standards for the extraction of raw materials foster a level playing field across countries and businesses and facilitate fair access and sustainable management of mineral resources, and so enable the extractive industries to fully contribute to the achievement of the Goals.

83. To promote sustainable consumption and production, there is a need to ensure strong political leadership for transformation accompanied by horizontal and vertical

coordination and supported by appropriate governance and institutional structures. Legislation that is supportive of sustainable consumption and production should be introduced, but change will not come without the provision of appropriate public resources. There is a need to increase awareness and improve education on sustainable consumption and production, including by demonstrating the cost of inaction. Knowledge gaps should be addressed by developing indicators and monitoring frameworks that can capture both the environmental and the socioeconomic impacts of consumption and production patterns. Digitalization presents opportunities that should be exploited.

Second round table on sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12): towards a circular economy — innovation for sustainable value chains

84. A circular economy is an economy that takes pollution and waste out of the system, maintains products and materials in use and regenerates natural capital. It promotes resource and energy efficiency, reduces food waste along the whole supply chain, builds sustainable infrastructure and provides access to basic services and green and decent jobs, for a better quality of life for all. It represents a horizontal approach offering an opportunity to achieve targets under many of the Sustainable Development Goals, including not only Goal 12 on responsible production and consumption, but also those related to water, energy, sustainable cities, climate change and sustainable use of natural resources, among others.

85. The transition from a linear to a circular model is still at a very early stage. Today, it is estimated that less than 10 per cent of the global economy is circular. This raises the question of how fast the transition can be achieved and how to deal with those economic sectors and activities that cannot make the transition fast enough. A systemic transition requires cooperation across all ministries and levels of government as well as a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach. An effective measurement and monitoring system needs to be in place to get the policy mix right.

86. Voluntary and bottom-up approaches can yield success, but enabling regulation is also important as a catalyst for change. Tackling regulatory barriers within and across countries appears to be efficient and cost-effective. At the same time, integrated packages of policy measures, such as fiscal incentives, investment in research and development, innovation along the whole product life cycle and sustainable public procurement, are also seen as instrumental in driving the necessary changes. Spurred by these measures, new business models are emerging. Social enterprises are playing an important role in this transformation, in particular in the sharing economy.

87. The necessary cultural shift can be facilitated through policies, regulations and approaches for strengthening consumers' awareness, such as traceability systems in value chains, eco-labelling schemes and sustainability standards. Market surveillance systems are essential to ensure compliance and enhance consumers' trust. While changes influencing consumer behaviour are important, extended producer responsibility and accountability are also considered important factors for change. Technological developments, such as blockchain technology, the Internet of things and artificial intelligence may be enablers for a systemic change, if properly harnessed.

88. At the same time, compliance with ecological and other sustainability standards developed in advanced economies may create market access barriers, particularly for small producers from transition and developing economies. The international community has a key role to play to create policy frameworks and platforms for knowledge and technology transfer and capacity-building. The transition to a circular

economy presents a great opportunity to create a positive narrative on economic integration and globalization.

First round table on sustainable forests and ecosystems (Goal 15): sustainable forest management and the Sustainable Development Goals

89. Forests are critical ecosystems, central to all three dimensions of sustainable development. Sustainable forest management also involves multiple dimensions, bringing together a range of stakeholders (forest owners, businesses, local and state authorities, non-governmental organizations and others), who must work together to maintain ecosystem functions and ensure the provision of forest-related services and goods.

90. Sustainable forest management allows the economic use of forests without having a damaging environmental impact. However, the perception of an irreconcilable conflict persists. There is therefore a need to better understand the potential of forest products for sustainable production and consumption and dispel misunderstandings that limit policy options.

91. Governance systems are often ill suited to meet the needs of sustainable forest management. Political support remains insufficient as there is limited understanding among policymakers of the multiple contributions forests can make. Businesses can play a critical role in driving change, including by demanding an appropriate framework in support of sustainable forest management. The sector also suffers from severe financial constraints, as sustainable forest management financing is still dominated by revenues from wood since other forest services do not generate sufficient financial returns.

92. Overall, there is a need to broaden and strengthen the basis of support for sustainable forest management. Improved communication and awareness-raising initiatives would spread knowledge on the potential of forests and forest products to make a significant contribution to the green/bio/circular economy as well as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Paris Agreement.

93. The creation of platforms facilitating dialogue between authorities, local communities, businesses, owners and consumers on choices to be taken around the management and use of forests can serve to reinforce mutual trust and provide the basis for strong partnerships. Widely accepted verification mechanisms, including transparent reporting, certification, traceability and consumer information, can contribute to enhancing confidence. Such mechanisms would facilitate the emergence of transformative business initiatives, changing the way of doing business in support of a circular economy through circular companies and the circular design of products (i.e. renewable and recyclable).

94. Sustainable forest management has strong linkages with other sustainable development goals and successful initiatives in this area can meet multiple simultaneous objectives, including, for example, afforestation to prevent erosion and sequester carbon, or the integration of biodiversity conservation into sustainable forest management. Individual initiatives work better when they are part of larger strategies, for instance being included in national strategies and actions or large-scale business plans. Sustainable forest management should pay attention to cross-sectoral issues, addressing linkages with tourism, agriculture and water, for example. Initiatives that generate income, including through providing assistance to forest owners and businesses in commercializing forest products, strengthen social support by creating jobs for local communities. Public interventions should also enhance the environmental capacities of forests, including by promoting peatland restoration, resilience to climate change, biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

95. Ultimately, success will depend on the development and adoption of a common understanding of sustainable forest management. For this to emerge, there is a need to open initiatives to all stakeholders and better involve consumers in choosing sustainable patterns of consumption on the basis of forest products. The discussions on wood and forests should involve audiences outside the forest sector, so that messages are widely shared and provide a strong basis for concerted action. This will support the recognition of the multiple roles that forests can make to the green economy and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Second round table on sustainable forests and ecosystems (Goal 15): biodiversity at the heart of sustainable development — towards transformation and resilience

96. Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems provide the foundation for life on earth and for much of our economic activities and support our social structures and cultural traditions. However, the continued loss of global biodiversity and the relentless pressure on ecosystems are alarming and well-established facts. The 2030 Agenda opens new possibilities to engage with broader policy audiences and other stakeholders in halting the loss of biodiversity, sharing the benefits of genetic resources and promoting access to such resources. Biodiversity should be mainstreamed, for example, in land use planning, agriculture and sustainable forest management. These interconnections open new pathways for policy interventions. Appropriate and accessible data, including through the use of information and communications technology, is required for monitoring purposes, so as to better understand the consequences of different actions and to facilitate the integration of different sectors in policy initiatives.

97. Coordination and integration of biodiversity concerns at the national level is often not done in a systematic manner. There is a need to be more ambitious in the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity and to drive transformational change through the integration of biodiversity into social, economic and climate policies, among others. However, efforts in this direction are frequently undermined by imperfect governance systems and insufficient political support, which partly reflects a limited understanding among policymakers of the essential role biodiversity plays. In some countries, these problems are compounded by institutional, political and financial instability. Enforcement of existing regulations is sometimes lacking.

98. The strong linkages between enhancing resilient ecosystems and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals are not fully appreciated. Initiatives to communicate the potential of biodiversity and build bridges between the different actors, including land users, are critical. This would widen the space for policy action and partnerships.

99. Biodiversity has a cross-sectoral dimension and therefore appropriate platforms for engaging all stakeholders around the management of ecosystems and the conservation of nature reserves should be promoted. In that regard, particularly close links exist between biodiversity and sustainable forest management. Consumers have an important role to play, so tools such as labelling and certification schemes are also helpful.

100. Efforts to protect nature can also contribute to economic development strategies. Close relations exist between economic and income-generating activities and biodiversity, for example tourism and agriculture. While potential conflicts exist, building trust among different stakeholders should facilitate appropriate management of these conflicts.

101. Resilient ecosystems have a positive influence on human health. They are also critical for maintaining the living conditions of indigenous people. Various approaches exist for the valorization of ecosystem services, which should be further explored in order to expand financing flows. Given all these benefits, continued attention should be paid to enhancing the environmental capacities of different ecosystems and promoting biodiversity.

102. Transboundary initiatives can address the cross-border dimension of some biodiversity issues and reap the benefits of various synergies that can be derived from international collaboration, which is supported by a number of normative frameworks, including the Convention on Biological Diversity. Local issues have significance on a wider scale, touching the national, regional and global levels. Coordination across borders requires resources and continued effort. Some countries are including biodiversity as part of development assistance financing to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

103. Further progress is required in developing a common understanding of biodiversity and, in particular, of the indicators that would make effective monitoring possible, thus providing the foundation for an effective cross-sectoral dialogue. The importance of biodiversity for implementation of the Goals is not sufficiently understood and therefore more data and analysis are required.

Connecting the dots: sustainable resource management and lifestyles in the region

104. The integrated 2030 Agenda requires initiatives that fully reflect the linkages between the different Goals, in terms of both their design and their implementation. Intersectoral coordination is key for effective implementation. Policy lessons drawn from actions targeting particular Goals may have a more general relevance and therefore should be disseminated beyond sectoral audiences. Sharing information and knowledge across sectoral boundaries is the basis for identifying initiatives that have a positive impact across different Goals.

105. All the Sustainable Development Goals that were considered in depth at the regional forum (those on water, energy, cities, sustainable consumption and production, sustainable forest management and biodiversity) have an impact on the achievement of other Goals. There are multiple and strong interlinkages. Sometimes, these have been reflected in specific normative instruments, such as the Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention. However, identifying them is not sufficient as a basis for informed policy actions. More progress is required on understanding, measuring and assessing these interrelationships.

106. A cross-sectoral approach is essential, but this should be complemented by the consideration of transboundary dimensions. Regional initiatives should serve as platforms to advance the Goals. Subregional integration associations in the region, including the Eurasian Economic Union, have an important role to play in the implementation of the Goals, in particular by stimulating trade through the adoption of common standards.

107. There is a need to reconcile different objectives and ensure that no one is left behind. For example, while addressing competing needs on water, equitable access should be guaranteed. Initiatives to improve energy efficiency should take into account issues of affordability for the poor and vulnerable. Integrated urban planning should address the needs of citizens of all ages. Ecosystem services and biodiversity also serve as an important source of livelihood for the rural poor.

108. The Sustainable Development Goals define a transformative agenda; but this transformation requires that the interest of all groups affected by the transition are taken into account. The introduction of more sustainable patterns of consumption and production will improve resource efficiency and can have beneficial effects in other areas, such as health. However, moving away from a linear to a circular economy also carries risks. While some economic activities will expand, others will contract. There is therefore a need to address job losses and skill gaps and introduce other forms of public intervention to smooth the effects of these changes.

109. The significance of appropriate information was remarked on by many participants. Policymaking should make a more intensive use of scientific knowledge. Evidence provides the foundation for a well-informed dialogue across different policy areas that effectively breaks down silos. It contributes to the effectiveness of communication initiatives and increased awareness of the implications of actions, including at the individual level.

110. Some policy instruments can also have a cross-sectoral dimension, if appropriately designed. Participants mentioned the use of sustainable public sector procurement as a useful tool having an impact across many areas. The potential of digitalization and information and communications technology should also be harnessed, as they are cross-cutting enablers for all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through the incorporation of information and communications technology in national sustainable plans and strategies.

111. Financing is a common constraint faced when trying to advance the various Goals. Overcoming this constraint requires imaginative responses that should take advantage of the possibilities offered by cross-sectoral cooperation. The involvement of the private sector, which is essential for rapid progress, would contribute to mobilizing the necessary financing.